



Critically ill child dies in Gaza waiting for referral and permit

Razan Salah, 11 years old, from Rafah, was admitted to European Gaza hospital on November 5 with sudden bleeding into the skin. After tests she was diagnosed with aplastic anemia (bone marrow failure) and referred on November 11 for urgent bone marrow transplantation available only in Israeli hospitals. However, new procedures within the Referral Abroad Department in Gaza and in Ramallah caused her referral to be delayed several days, misdirected to a hospital that lacks the capacity to treat the condition, then refused for financial coverage for a bone marrow transplant, which the receiving Israeli hospital had requested. Razan was approved only for an outpatient appointment. The family applied for an urgent permit from Israeli authorities to exit Erez, without an immediate response. On the evening of November 20, Razan's condition deteriorated and she was transferred to the pediatric ICU, where she died 5 days later.



Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: RAD11 (Dec. 31, 2014)

Summary: November 2014

Access restrictions tighten

- **Rafah border:** Gaza's access to Egypt through Rafah has been completely closed since October 25 following an attack in north Sinai which killed 30 Egyptian soldiers. So far in 2014, the terminal has been closed on 216 days (65% of days).
- **Access through Erez:** only 78.97% of 1,636 patients who applied for Israeli permits to exit Gaza via Erez for medical treatment in November were approved. 44 patients (19 females and 25 males, including 15 children and 4 elderly) were denied permits. 300 patients (111 females and 189 males, including 82 children and 21 elderly people over 60) received no response to their applications, and missed their medical treatment appointments.
- **Interrogations:** 17 patients (including 1 female) were requested to attend Israeli security interviews after applying for a permit to cross Erez.

Casualty patients

- 29 patients (including 11 children) with war-related injuries applied to exit Gaza via Erez checkpoint. 23 were approved to exit for travel to Jordan, and 6 were delayed. The patients had been referred by the Ministry of Health during November with the cost to be covered by the receiving hospitals.

Patient detained at Erez

- A patient remains in Israeli detention for 26 days after being arrested in Erez checkpoint enroute to his hospital treatment (page 6).

Low referrals reflect new policy guidelines

- **Child dies while waiting for referral/permit approval:** see photo story above.
- **Regular referrals declined 22%:** the Ministry of Health Referral Abroad Department (RAD) in Gaza referred 1,448 patients in November to hospitals outside of (MoH) facilities, 22% less than the monthly average for the first half of 2014.
- **Gender gap:** the gender gap in referrals widened: 58.43% male patients versus 41.57% female patients. 25.07% of all referrals were for children aged 0-17 years and 19.54% were for patients aged over 60 years.
- **Estimated cost of referrals for October:** NIS 6,144,932.

Referrals

Referrals of Gaza patients

The changes since July in number and destinations of Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) referrals for patients in Gaza continued in November and appeared to reflect new guidelines discussed within the ministry to reduce referral costs. Since July the number of referrals to medical facilities in Israel and within Gaza has been cut in half compared to the first half of the year, while referrals to East Jerusalem hospitals have increased 7% to 643 (the highest monthly record since the WHO started to monitor referrals). Referrals within Gaza increased in November to a five-month high, but are still lower than earlier in the year (**Table 1, Chart 1**). The lack of capacity in specialized treatments of the Ministry of Health and the private sector within Gaza remains the main driver for referrals.

Referrals consume one-third of the MoH budget and, due to budget shortfalls, result in increasing debts to referral hospitals. Jordanian hospitals have refused to accept MoH referral patients since 2013 as a result of outstanding debt from the Palestinian Authority. The cost of treatment for referral patients in Israeli hospitals, however, is paid immediately to Israeli hospitals from withholdings of import and VAT taxes collected by Israel for the Palestinian Authority which it is obligated to transfer monthly.

Table 1: Palestinian MoH Referrals, by destination, January – November 2014

Referral Destination	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Total	Monthly average Jan-June 2014
Gaza (non-MoH facilities)	347	430	425	452	305	257	67	110	193	146	190	2,922	369
WB (MoH and non-MoH)	277	289	309	296	321	337	123	158	219	193	259	2,781	305
East Jerusalem	558	545	620	623	615	640	210	276	562	441	643	5,733	600
Jordan	3	1	3	1	1	2	0	3	2	0	0	16	2
Israel	465	428	423	345	376	411	120	158	153	203	199	3,281	408
Egypt	198	175	134	163	160	158	60	134	361	205	157	1,905	165
Total	1,848	1,868	1,914	1,880	1,778	1,805	580	839	1,490	1,188	1,448	16,638	1,849

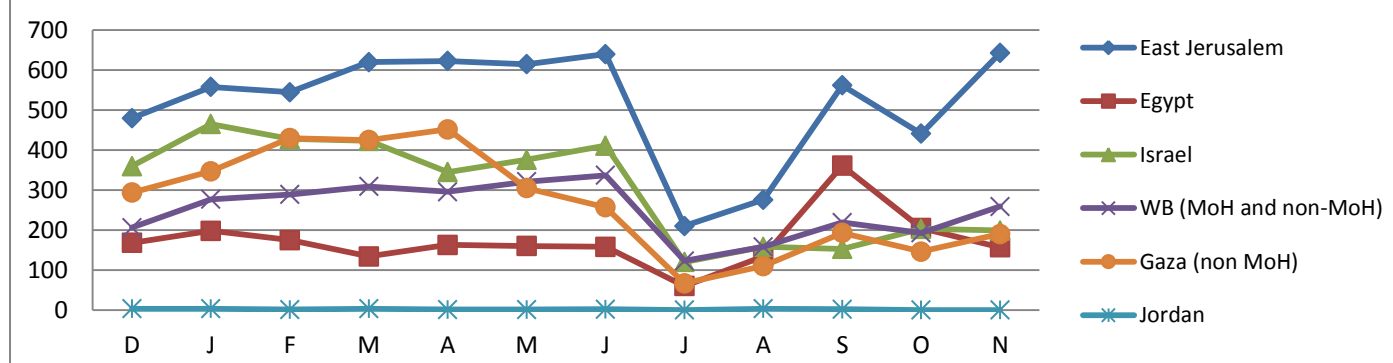
Source: Ministry of Health Referral Abroad Department, Gaza

Referrals have averaged 1,109 per month since July, representing a loss of 3,700 patients without referrals over the five-month period.

Of the 1,448 patients referred in November, 1,258 (87%) were to health facilities outside Gaza: 1,101 patients (76%) required permits from Israeli authorities to exit through Erez crossing and 157 required approval from Egypt to exit through Rafah.

In November the 190 referrals to non-MoH facilities in Gaza were mainly for MRI (74), heart catheterization (67), rehabilitation (13), pediatrics (10), and 7 other specialties (26).

Chart 1: 12-month trend of referral destinations of Gaza patients, Dec. 2013 to Nov. 2014



25.07% of patients referred were children aged 0-17 years and 19.54% were elderly patients over 60. Female referral patients were 41.57% of the total, compared to 58.43% male patients. 94% of referrals in November were for hospital admissions and 6% for outpatient clinics. 88.4% of referral applications were processed by the RAD within 30 days

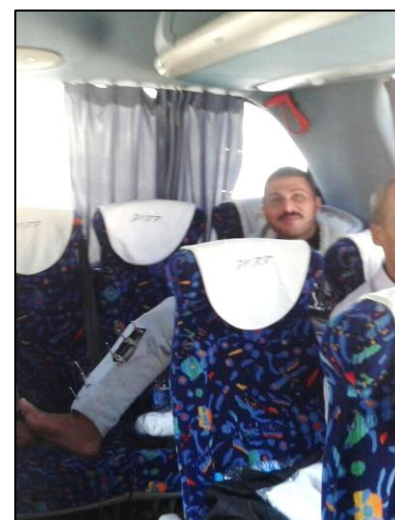
Note: The data of the central RAD office in Ramallah for Gaza referrals includes an additional 265 referrals not registered in the Gaza data. It indicates that 1,713 patients with Gaza IDs were given financial coverage for referrals in November. The estimated cost for these referrals based on the main RAD in Ramallah was NIS 8,844,406.

Medical reasons for referrals: The top ten specialties requiring referrals for treatment were: oncology—224 referrals (15.47%), orthopaedic surgery —142 (9.81%), ophthalmology—117 (8.08%), nuclear medicine—113 (7.8%), heart catheterization—102 (7.04%), paediatrics—91 (6.28%), MRI —77 (5.32%), neurosurgery—76 (5.25%), general surgery—61 (4.21%), haematology—57 (3.94%) and the remaining 386 (26.8%) referrals were to 19 other specialities.

Referrals of casualty patients: the Ministry referred 29 casualty patients with complicated injuries to hospitals outside of Gaza. 24 of them were to Jordan hospitals and 5 were to Makassed hospital in East Jerusalem. 11 were children under 18 and 10 were females. Of the 29 patients, 23 were approved permits to cross Erez in November, and 6 were delayed.

On November 20, 21 casualty patients crossed Erez in their way to Amman. Salamitkom, an Arab organization registered in Israel which supports Palestinian patients, provided transportation for the patients from Erez to Allenby Bridge. Salamitkom facilitated the travel of 18 of the patients back to Gaza two weeks later when their treatment was completed. Three remain in a Jordanian hospital for treatment.

RAD officials in Gaza said that most of the casualty patients who had applied for referrals at the end of the war were treated locally and no longer need referrals, especially those with healed fractures, and will re-evaluate patients still on the waiting list. A special medical committee which was to be formed to follow up the remaining casualty patients has not yet been formed.



21 casualty patients travelled from Gaza to Jordan for treatment, November 20. © WHO/Salamitkom

Access through Rafah

Patient access to Egypt remains restricted: According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, no travellers were allowed to exit Rafah terminal towards Egypt during the month of November, including patients. The terminal was opened by the Egyptian authorities in one direction for people returning to Gaza only on 3 days (Nov. 26, 27, and 30) allowing 2,160 travellers who were stranded in Egypt to return to Gaza.

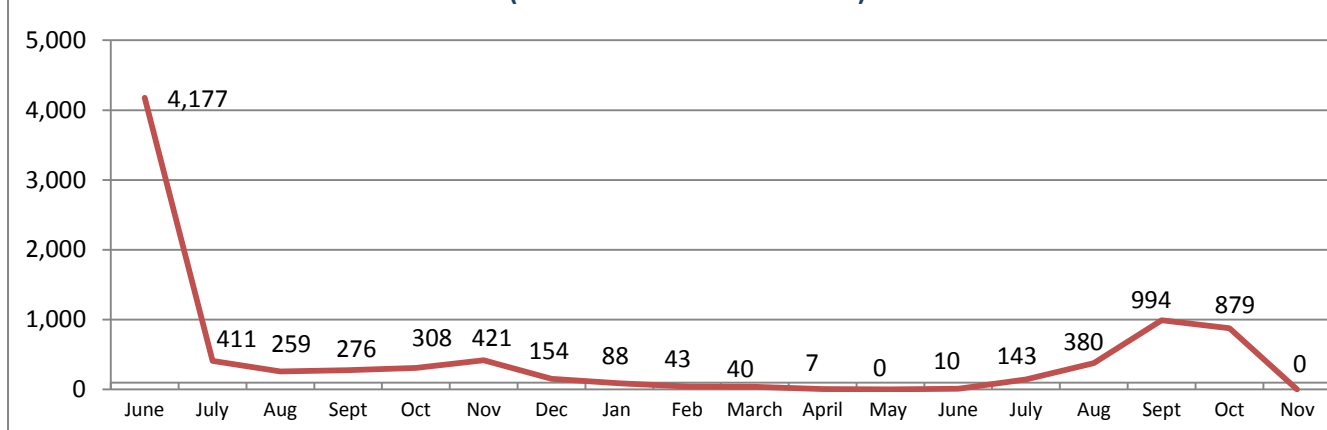
The Palestinian authorities at Rafah terminal reported that no medical delegations were allowed to cross into Gaza from Egypt during November and no medical supply shipments entered.

The terminal has been completely closed since Oct. 25 following the attack in north Sinai which killed 30 Egyptian soldiers. Until the end of November, the terminal was closed for exit on 216 days in 2014 (64% of days).

Access to Egypt has been restricted since July 2013. Access improved for casualties and others during and immediately after the July-August military attack on Gaza but in October access was restricted by the security closure late in the month and totally closed in November (**Chart 2**).

The MoH estimates that some 1000 patients are waiting to exit Gaza, including those with advanced cancer, renal and heart diseases, and orthopedic and ophthalmological needs. An additional 1000 patients are unable to return, delaying the continuation of their treatment inside Gaza (**OCHA Humanitarian Update**, 25 November 2014). A senior heart surgeon for Gaza and five medical delegations were among those stranded on the Egyptian side of the border.

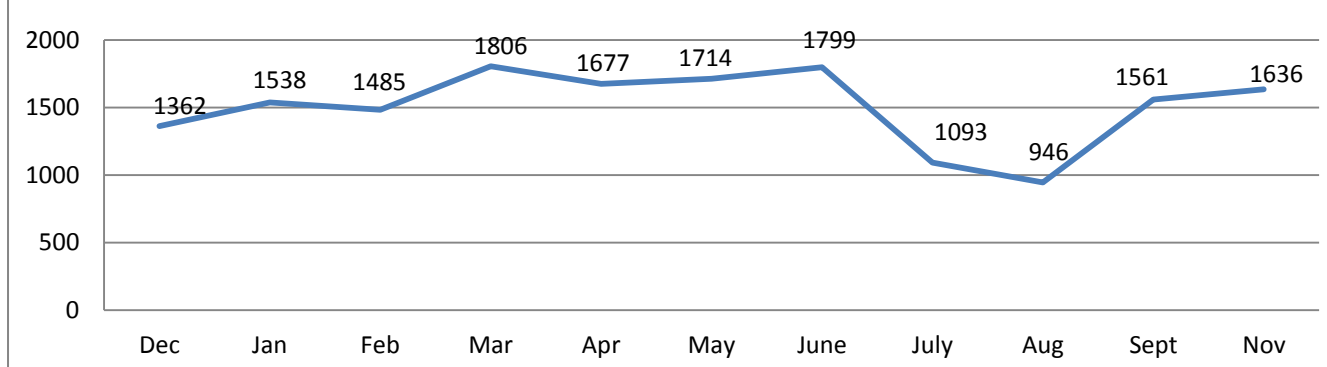
**Chart 2: Patients seeking health care access through Rafah terminal to Egypt
(June 2013 - November 2014)**



Access through Erez

In November, the total number of patients' applications for permits to cross Erez (casualty patients as well as normal referral patients) was 1,636, consistent with the pre-conflict monthly average of 1,670 applications (**Chart 3**). Out of the 1636 permit applications, 780 (47.68%) were for patients destined to East Jerusalem, 438 (26.77%) to Israel, 361(22.07%) to West Bank and 57 (3.48%) to Jordan.

**Chart 3: 12-month trend in patient permit application to cross Erez,
December 2013-November 2014**



In November, 1,292 (78.97%) of patients' permit applications were approved, a drop from the average approval rate for the first half of 2014 of 84% (**Table 2**). 44 applicants (2.69%) were denied access. 300 (18.34%) did not receive an answer in time for their hospital appointments and therefore suffered delay in health care.

Table 2: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by age, sex and GSS risk, November 2014

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called for GSS interrogation	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	76	99	59	85	2	4	15	10	0	0
4 - 17	146	197	114	163	5	4	27	30	0	2
18- 40	191	248	128	137	12	13	51	98	1	12
41 - 60	205	210	193	170	0	4	12	36	0	1
Over 60	106	158	100	143	0	0	6	15	0	1
Sub-total	724	912	594	698	19	25	111	189	1	16
Total	1,636		1,292 (78.97%)		44 (2.69%)		300 (18.34%)		17 (1.04%)	

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

The volume of permit applications for the period from January–November was 33.6% higher in 2014 than in 2013, while the approval rate was 6.45% lower for the same period. A total of 472 patients were denied access so far in 2014 compared to only 36 patients denied in 2013 during the same period, indicating increased restrictions in health access (**Table 3**).

Table 3: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by response, sex of applicant and comparison with corresponding periods in 2013 and 2014 (number and %)

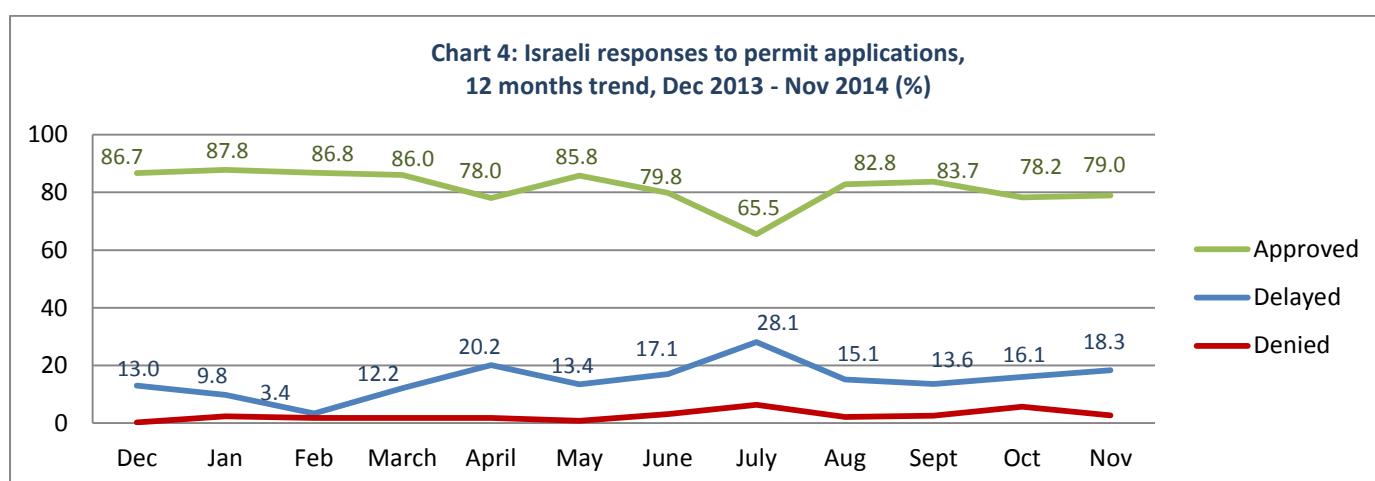
Period	November 2013		November 2014		January – November 2013		January – November 2014	
Total	1,347 (F:625; M:722)		1,636 (F:724; M:912)		12,414 (F:5,780; M:6,634)		16,582 (F:7,541; M:9,041)	
Approved	1,227 (F:588; M:639)	91.09%	1,292 (F:594; M:694)	78.97%	10,939 (F:5,243; M:5,696)	88.12%	13,542 (F:6,473; M:7,069)	81.67%
Denied	5 (F:0; M:5)	0.37%	44 (F:19; M:25)	2.69%	36 (F:3; M:33)	0.29%	472 (F:156; M:316)	2.85%
Delayed	115 (F:37; M:78)	8.54%	300 (F:111; M:189)	18.34%	1,439 (F:533; M:906)	11.59%	2,568 (F:912; M:1,656)	15.48%
-- called for GSS interrogation (of total applicants)	14 (F:4; M:10)	1.04%	17 (F:1; M:16)	1.04%	164 (F:33; M:131)	1.32%	159 (F:20; M:139)	0.96%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Financial coverage: 91.32% of all patients applying for Israeli permits in November were referred by the Palestinian MoH, 3.36% were self-funded, 1.77% funded by receiving hospitals (29 casualties), 1.41% by the Peres Center for Peace, 1.16% by Nour Al-Alam foundation, 0.61% by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, and 0.37% by military medical services. Patients and companions often face financial problems during long stays in hospitals due to uncovered costs such as transportation, companion costs and some patient care items such as medicines not available in the hospital supply.

Denied care: 44 patients (19 females; 25 males) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 15 children and 4 persons over 60 years. 34 of the denied patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals, 8 in Israel and 2 in Jordan. Of the denied patients, 38 were financially covered by the Palestinian MoH, 4 self-funded, 1 by Noor Ala-Alam Foundation and 1 by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel. 33 patients waited 1-7 days, 9 waited 8-14 days, and 2 waited 15-30 before their applications were denied. 7 patients out of the 44 people denied had appointments for ophthalmology, 7 pediatric, 6 neurosurgery, 3 orthopedics, 3 urology and the remaining 18 application were for 10 other specialties.

Chart 4 shows the percentage trend in approvals, denials and delays over a 12-month period.



Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Delayed care: According to the Palestinian District Coordination office, 300 patient applicants (189 males; 111 females), including 82 children and 21 patients over the age of 60, received no response to their applications and consequently lost their hospital appointments. Of the 300 patients delayed, 76.33% had scheduled appointments in East Jerusalem or West Bank hospitals, 20.33% in Israel, and 3.33% in Jordan. The Ministry of Health financially

covered 91.67% of these referrals, 2.67% were funded by Noor Ala-Alam Foundation, 2% casualties covered by the receiving hospitals, 2% were self-funded, 0.67% by Peres center for peace, 0.67% by the medical military service and 0.33% by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel.

Patients should apply 10 days prior to their appointments and Israeli authorities should give a response to applicants within that time. Of the patients delayed, 33% of applications (99 of 300) were submitted within 1 week prior to the scheduled appointment. 135 (45%) patients were still awaiting a response up to 2 weeks, 61 (20.33%) up to one month and 5 after one month. Out of the 300 applications, 26 were eventually approved but after the appointment date had passed. The delayed patients had scheduled appointments in orthopedics (51), cardiology (38), oncology (32), ophthalmology (32), neurosurgery (26), nuclear medicine (25), pediatrics (21), hematology (14), and the rest were 61 for 13 different specialties.

Security Interviews: 17 patients (16 males; 1 female) were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS) as a condition to process their application.

Patients and companions crossed Erez: The office of the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,112 patients crossed Erez in November to access hospitals in the West Bank including Jerusalem, Israeli hospitals, or Jordanian hospitals, in addition to 1,076 companions. Of the 1,112 patients, 93 were transferred by ambulances (back-to-back). Erez crossing was open for 25 days with regular day-time working hours and closed for 5 days (5 Saturdays) during the month.

Medical delegates through Erez

The WHO applied for 12 foreign health professionals to enter Gaza to support the Palestinian health system in the aftermath of the recent conflict. The WHO applies for permits to cross Erez into or out of Gaza through an online system for health professionals. Until December 23, 2014, 11 (91.7%) of the 12 who applied were approved entry, and one is still in process.

Patient detained for second time by Israeli authorities at Erez, 26 days and released

According to Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, Mohammed Khamis Hamdan, 51 years old from Nusseirat refugee camp, has an ophthalmic problem that requires surgery; he was referred to a Jordanian center for ophthalmic surgery, where he had eye surgery several years ago. Mohammed received a permit to cross Erez in November 18, 2014, but was arrested by the Israeli authorities when he attempted to cross.

The family reported that Mohammed had left his house at 7 a.m., travelled to Erez and kept contact with the family. The last call was at 11 am on the same day. Two days later the family received a call from the Israeli authorities telling them that Mohammed has been arrested and was being detained in Ashkelon prison. The family reported that Mohammed was released in December 14, 2014 after 26 days of detention and had no trial.

Earlier this year on September 17, 2014, Mohammed had also received a permit to travel for the same purpose. At that time he was detained and interrogated for 6 hours before being forced to return to Gaza.